

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9131

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AMEMBASSY PARIS

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USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 3650

PASS TO AMBASSADOR RIVERO

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, MARR, SP

SUBJECT: REMOVAL OF CHIEF OF HIGH GENERAL STAFF

1. SOURCES IN HIGH GENERAL STAFF AND IN PRESIDENCIA CONFIRM THAT DECISION HAS BEEN MADE TO REPLACE LT. GEN. MANUEL DIEZ-ALEGRIA AS CHIEF OF HIGH GENERAL STAFF. ACTION, WHICH SOURCES STATE STILL SUBJECT TO REVERSAL OR DELAY, REPORTEDLY WILL COME IN "NEAR FUTURE".

CIVILIAN NEWS AGENCY SOURCE, CITING FOREIGN MINSITRY SOURCES, STATES NOTIFICATION OF REMOVAL HAS ALREADY BEEN SENT TO DIEZ-ALEGRIA IN TUNIS, WHERE HE IS NOW ON OFFICIAL VISIT UNTIL JUNE 13.

2. WHILE SOME REPORTS INDICATE GOS HAS ALREADY CHOSEN REPLACEMENT-- MOST FREQUENTLY RUMORED SELECTIONS BEING LT. GEN. FERNANDEZ DE SANTIAGO Y DIAZ DE MENDIVIL (CAPT GENERAL OF BALEARICS) OR LT GEN. JOSE MARIA PEREZ DE LEMA (CAPT GEN OF CANARIES) BEST INDICATIONS FROM HIGH GENERAL
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STAFF AND PRESIDENCIA SOURCES IS

THAT FINAL DECISION ON REPLACEMENT NOT YET MADE NOR HAS
DECISION BEEN
MADE REGARDING ONWARD ASSIGNMENT OF DIEZ-ALEGRIA. IF NORMAL PRO-
CEDURES ARE FOLLOWED, ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHANGE WOULD NOT BE MADE
EARLIER THAN JUN 21, WHICH IS DATE OF NEXT DECISION-MAKING
MEETING OF COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. BUT ONE SOURCE STATES

WIDESPREAD LEAKAGE TO PRESS MAY FORCE EARLIER ANNOUNCEMENT.

3. COMMENT: REMOVAL OF DIEZ-ALEGRIA LIKELY TO INTENSIFY CURRENT
SPECULATION ABOUT GROWING BUT SO FAR MUFFLED STRUGGLE BETWEEN
RIGHT-WING MILITARY LEADERS AND CIVILIAN ALLIES, ON ONE HAND,
AND LEADING PORPONENTS OF CURRENT PROGRAM OF POLITICAL LIBERLI-
ZATION ON OTHER. ACCORDING TO THIS LINE OF SPECULATION, DIEZ-
ALEGRIA, WHOSE LIBERAL RECORD NEVER MADE HIM POPULAR
AMONG RIGHTIST MILITARY LEADERS, HAD PROVOKED PRESSURES FROM
RIGHT FOR HIS REMOVAL BY OUTSPOKEN SUPPORT KOR LIBERALIZATION,
PRESUMED IDENTIFICATION WITH PROTUGAL'S
REFORMIST MILITARY AND HIS SEEMING SOFTNESS TOWARD COMMUNISM AS
DEMONSTRATED IN RECENT VISIT TO BUCHAREST.

4. IN FACT DIEA-ALEGRIA HAS BEEN LIBERAL ONLY IN RELATIVE SENSE
WITHIN CONTEXT OF PREVAILING POLITICAL VIEWS OF SPANISH
MILITARY AND SUGGESTIONS THAT HE HAS BEEN FORCED OUT IN RIGHT
WING POWERPLAY ARE AT BEST SPECULATIVE. MORE LIKELY THAT DIEZ
ALEGRIA'S POLITICAL VIEWS HAVE NOT DAMAGED HIS STANDING AS MUCH
AS HIS PENCHANT FOR INDEPENDENT ACTION. HIS ASSOCIATION WITH
OR COMMITMENT TO CONTROVERSIAL STEPS (SUCH AS LEGISLATION
LIBERLIZING TREATMENT OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS ANC CURRENT
PROPOSAL FOR NEW ORGANIC DEFENSE LAW, WHICH WOULD IMPOSE
GREATER UNIFICATION ON SPANISH ARMED FORCES) MAY ALSO HAVE
DRAINED HIS STOCK OF POLITICAL CAPITAL. NOTEWORTHY WAS TIMING
AND TONE OF FULL PAGE COMMENTARY IN RIGHT-WING "ALCAZAR"
JUNE 10 SUGGESTING THAT DRAFT DEFENSE LAW AIMS AT CREATING DE
FACTO DEFENSE MINISTRY AND AT
INCREASING POWER OF HIGH GENERAL STAFF AT EXPENSE OF INDIVIDUAL
SERVICES.

5. WHILE PRECISE MOTIVES FOR REMOVAL REMAIN UNCLEAR, EMBASSY'S
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SOURCES HAVE STRESSED THAT IT SHOULD BE LOOKED AT MORE AS NORMAL
COMPLETION OF ASSIGNMENT RAHTER THAN AS ABRUPT AND DRASTIC STEP.
DIEZ-ALEGRIA, WHO IS 68 YEARS OLD, WOULD HAVE NORMALLY PASSED TO
STANDBY RESERVE CATEGORY (GROUP B) TWO YEARS AGO AND MUST RETIRE
MANDATORILY IN 1976. HE WILL COMPLETE FOUR YEARS AS CHIEF
OF HIGH GENERAL STAFF IN JULY. WHEN HE WAS CONTINUED IN POST IN
1972, HE TOLD AIR ATT HE HAD BEEN EXTENDED FOR TWO YEARS.
PRESIDENCIA SOURCE EXPLAINS THAT ARIAS' ADMINISTRATION HAS HAD

THESE AND OTHER CHANGES UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR SOME TIME, BUT IN CASE OF DIEZ-ALEGRIA, DEFERRED ACTION UNTIL AFTER RETIREMENT OF AMBITIOUS RIGHT WING GENERAL CARLOS INIESTA CANO IN MAY TO FORESTALL LOBBYING TO PLACE INIESTA IN HIGH GENERAL STAFF VACANCY. INIESTA AND LT. GEN. JOSE VEGA RODRIGUEZ (NEW COMMANDER, GUARDIA CIVIL) HAVE IN PAST TOLD DATT THEY WANTED POST OF CHIEF, HIGH GENERAL STAFF.

6. IN WEIGHING POSSIBLE REPERCUSSIONS OF REMOVAL IN ARMED FORCES, KEY CONSIDERATION IS FACT THAT DIEZ-ALEGRIA LONG HAS BEEN MORE POPULAR AND RESPECTED IN SPANISH CIVILIAN AND INTERNATIONAL CIRCLES THAN AMONG PROFESSIONALS OF SPANISH MILITARY, WHO ARE GENERALLY MORE IMPRESSED BY HIS LACK OF MAJOR COMMAND EXPERIENCE THAN BY HIS INTELLECT AND INTERNATIONALISM. APPARENT DISMISSAL OF ONE OF FEW LIBERAL GENERALS WILL LIKELY HEIGHTEN EIXISTING FEARS IN CIVILIAN SECTORS FAVORING POLITICAL CHANGE THAT CONSERVATIVES AND THEIR MILITARY ALLIES STEPPING UP EFFORT TO THWART LIBERALIZATION. AXELROD

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